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# HOUSEHOLD HYGIENE

By ISABEL McISAAC

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## VIII

### THE DRUDGERY OF HOUSEKEEPING

THE writer is well aware that the title of this paper may arouse the antagonism of some persons, who profess to have been endowed with certain knowledge of the proper work women were intended for in the scheme of creation, and who, by trite sentimentalism, endeavor to hide the chains which bind the majority of women to the drudgery of house-keeping. No one can nor would wish to deny that home is a woman's sphere, and had she been taught to fill her place centuries ago and been given any proper recognition of the importance of her work, the modern household would not be in its present chaotic condition.

The average man of decent family is prepared for the business of life, and by his intelligence and industry can mount above the dreary grind of business details and see far-reaching results of his labors; but the average woman is given no training nor preparation for the two most important duties in the whole business of life,—child-bearing and house-keeping,—and is suddenly thrust into a flood of work and responsibility so great that it is small wonder so many go down to mental and physical wreck.

It seems to be an historical fact that until great questions of justice and morality become economic questions, little progress is made toward their settlement; and here we have to-day a sudden awakening of the whole world to the fact that the very foundations of national life are being undermined by the demoralization of family life. In other words men are coming to see "what every woman knows," that the proper management of a household cannot be relegated to common, ignorant women, for it *represents the foundation upon which stands all of the other work of the world*, and that the women of the nation must be prepared for it and must receive credit for it, not in sentimental talk, but in recognition of its mental, moral, and economic value to the world. The wonder is that women did not rebel ages ago against the injustice of the world's attitude to the house and the home keepers.

The drudgery of housekeeping will probably never be less, but if the housemothers are prepared for it and the worth of their work recognized, the most difficult and unsatisfactory phases will be removed and the whole aspect of domestic life changed.

The lack of training and intelligence in many housekeepers manifests itself in their slavery to non-essentials and conventionalities. It would be amusing were it not so pitiful, to see their desperate devotion to elaborate cooking with no possible reference to food values and to intricately fashioned garments, difficult alike to make and launder. In such households conventional devotion to looks excludes comfort and makes the housewife a slave.

Margaret Deland in "Old Chester Tales" delineates in Martha King, the doctor's wife, the type of housewife too familiar to us all: one who dusts daily behind the pictures and washes the windows every week, regardless of the happenings of the whole world.

It is a tremendous problem, far greater than the tariff or who reached the North Pole first, and the conditions must be changed, relieving the housekeeper, before the family life and ties are strengthened.

The domestic conditions in cities are deplorable enough, but it is worse on the farms; farm machinery has greatly relieved the work of the men, but the domestic machinery has changed very little and the average farmer's wife is really sentenced to hard labor for life. Groups of wise men come together and ponderously consider how to keep the young people on the farm, and any simple farm wife can tell them, that no matter what else is done no change will occur so long as the housewife is nothing but a weary kitchen drudge.

There is something terribly and tragically wrong when a middle-aged woman, who has been a faithful wife, mother, and housekeeper, will say that she had rather bury her daughters than see them such household drudges as she herself has been. Such women mistakenly try to shield their daughters, which makes a bad matter worse, but while we may deplore their shortsightedness we cannot fail to respect and admire their self-sacrifice in trying to spare their children.

Mrs. Lyndon Evans, speaking recently in Chicago, said that it had become a recognized custom to acknowledge the wisdom of caring for the sick in hospitals which has relieved housekeepers of one great burden they formerly carried, and that undoubtedly more and more work, such as laundry, sewing, and even cooking, would be done outside of the house, and at the same time the housekeepers be trained to make their expenditures wisely. Such changes, however, come slowly, and the results of past centuries will be carried by the rank and file of women who represent

the great bulk of humanity for many generations to come. That work which is of such vital importance to the human race should have fallen to such low estate is the most deplorable condition of modern life; the wonder is not, however, that it should be so but that a state of affairs depending upon the lives of women and their children could have existed so long.

Whatever faults the present system of training nurses may have, there is certainly no better form of education than one in which theory and practice dwell together, and in consequence the training a nurse receives is one of the best possible preparations for the business of housekeeping. In any busy hospital and training school nurses must constantly choose between the essential and the non-essential, such choice often being a matter coming close to life and death, and in time becomes a habit or mental attitude to all kinds of work. A nurse, upon leaving the hospital, finds herself in a state of surprise and bewilderment at the amount of time frittered away in all occupations upon non-essentials and, particularly, upon futile work. One man builds for another to destroy; the streets are paved and straightway the electrician, the sewer builder, or the railway contractor begins to destroy the pavement; the teacher leaves his work before his plans have been worked out, a new teacher takes his place and new methods are instituted to the confusion of the student; and the housewife wastes her time and substance upon the foolish adornment of her house while her family suffers in health and comfort from its faulty hygiene. Again let me repeat that a nurse should make a good housekeeper, her training fitting her to recognize and put aside the non-essentials which constitute so large a part of household drudgery, allowing her to drive her work rather than to be driven by it. A sane, wholesome respect for cleanliness lies at the bottom of the good health and comfort of the family, but a mania for surgical cleanliness can destroy every vestige of comfort in the house and not only ruin the temper but the health of the housekeeper.

Striving to keep up the appearance of a large income upon small means is the most soul-racking performance any woman can undertake and is so foolish and unsatisfactory one is amazed to see the number of its devotees. To such housekeepers the pleasure of a cup of tea with the good talk of a friend is lost in cream puffs and the flub-dubberty of lace doilies and the newest thing in china painting; the kindly fruits of the earth must be made into pies, the children's petticoats must have lace ruffles, and to put the tea things into the kitchen sink over night that the housekeeper may go to the theatre is as serious as breaking one of the Ten Commandments.

Viewed in the most favorable light, modern housekeeping is a difficult problem with increasing difficulties, whether the house be one of luxury or poverty, and a woman to accomplish it must bring to it intelligence, training, enthusiasm, and good health; she will need them all and must shut her eyes and ears to much of the alluring world outside of her domain. With half a chance the average woman could be happy, and although she recognizes the drudgery of her lot her intelligence will discern its final significance and the welfare of her family be her compensation.

The writer realizes that these are not orthodox views; it is a much more comfortable belief to say that home is a woman's proper sphere and there she finds her happiness, but after many years of observation in the homes of rich and poor, from the pitiful physical wrecks in hospitals, in the cottages of factory employes, in the cabins of lumbermen and fishermen, and in lonely farmhouses, the fact will not be denied that a large proportion of women who keep their houses are pathetically unsatisfied with their lives. It should not be true, for under right conditions the making and keeping of a home is the happiest work a woman can have, and it is high time the world should stop to ask the reasons for the present unhappy state of affairs.

THE END

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## A LABRADOR CATECHISM

By FELIX J. KOCH

WHEN Explorer Peary kept the world in breathless suspense for an entire day because his vessel could not put in at Chateaux, as it had promised, but was forced to beat on to Battle Harbour, there to send in its message of Polar discovery, he gave new lease of life to a little settlement, unknown well-nigh save in the north, which forms first port-of-call for ships bound to Labrador and beyond.

Battle Harbour is substantially a hospital station of the Royal Deep Sea Mission to fishermen, and there they are fighting a battle against the great white plague which is so sadly decimating the ranks of those who take the cod for half the world.

As part of that crusade, Battle Harbour has been made a point of dissemination for a curious "*Catechism*," the work of Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell and "printed for use in the Newfoundland and Labrador